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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of six texts from a workplace literacy curriculum designed to assist learners in facing the increased demands of the workplace. It is a short guide to workplace health and safety issues, laws, and regulations, especially in Massachusetts. Topics covered include the following: (1) safety issues--workplace ergonomics, the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, safety awareness at work, road safety; (2) health issues--smoke- and drug-free workplace, drugs/AIDS testing, Right to Know law on hazardous wastes, Massachusetts law on maternity benefits and maternity leave of absence, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, Workmen's Compensation, stress, time management, Employee Assistance Program; and (3) health and safety legal issues--Equal Employment Opportunity laws, sexual harassment, cultural diversity, and signs of a high-quality working environment. (KC)

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WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

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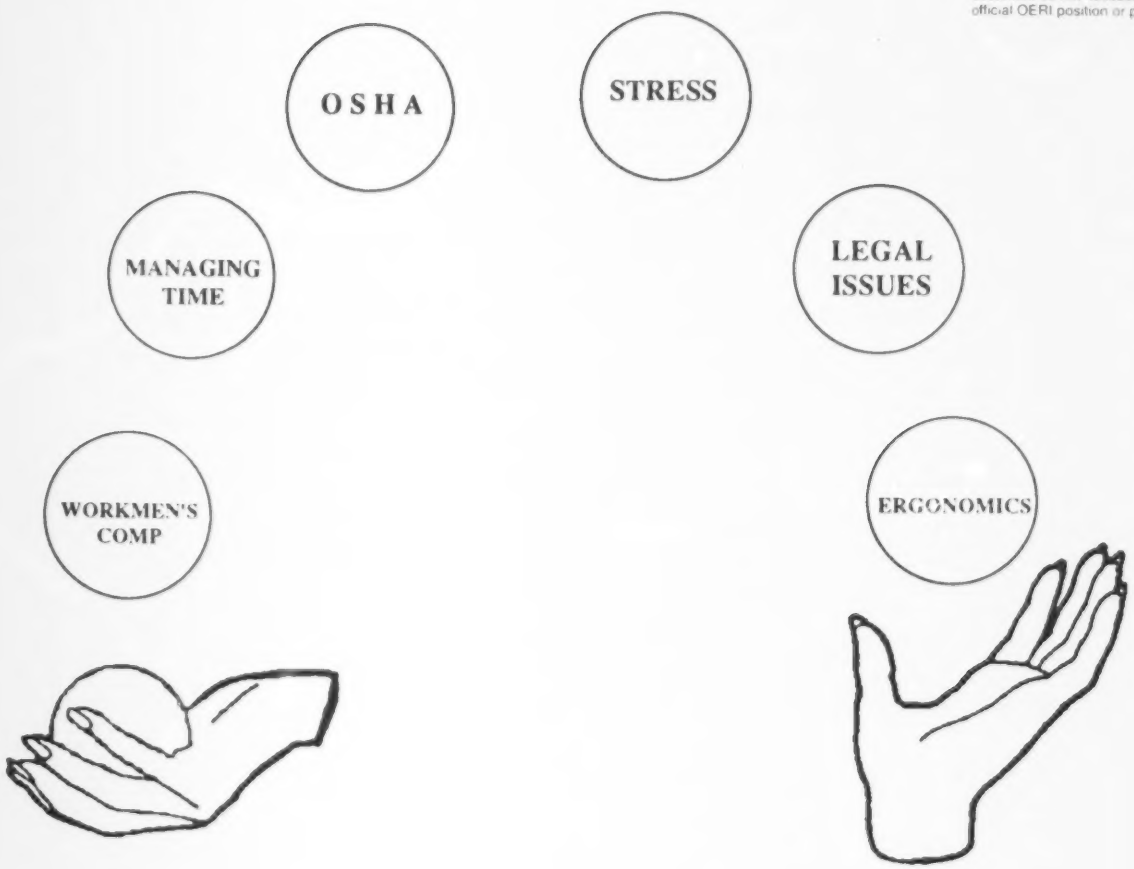

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INTRODUCTION

Employment enables people to earn an income in order to meet basic human needs. It also allows monies for the finer enjoyments of life. More importantly, employment provides you with an opportunity to be a productive and contributing member of society. Success at work gives you a sense of pride in who you are and what you can accomplish.

I'M REALLY GOOD AT WHAT I DO AND

I WANT TO FIND A GREAT PLACE

TO DO IT.

A good part of the day is spent at work. Over a lifetime, this amounts to a lot of time and energy. Because work consumes such a large part of life, it is important that both employers and employees be aware of health and safety issues that affect their happiness and success in the working environment.

Health and safety awareness, along with related legal issues, form the content of this booklet. The topics highlighted are vital to your well-being; in fact, your life may depend on it.

EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

CARE ABOUT THE QUALITY

OF THEIR WORK ENVIRONMENT.

SAFETY ISSUES

3.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

1. Workplace death, illness, and injury don't get nearly the attention of dramatic disasters, but the human costs are much greater.
2. Back pain afflicts 8 out of 10 Americans. More than half of all back injuries result from work activity.
3. One invisible and often overlooked component of an office environment is air. Poor air quality may result in rashes, headaches, fatigue, itchy eyes, and congestion.
4. Most safety experts believe that management, training, and workplace safety determine whether the worker pays for his or her error with life or limb.
5. The second leading cause of workplace death is falls.
6. In commercial establishments, falls occur more often and result in more severe injuries than any other type of accident.
7. Excessive heat combined with increased activity can be dangerous, especially for older adults and people who are overweight.
8. Approximately 80% of employees experience some degree of stress in their lives. Five of the 10 leading causes of death are due to lifestyle.
9. Structure and nonstructure fires numbered 2,041,500 in one year, with a property loss of over 9 billion dollars.
10. Substance abusers have 4 times as many accidents, are absent 2.5 times more, file 5 times more compensation claims, and file 3 times more health benefit claims than do non-abusers.

WORKPLACE ERGONOMICS

If the word ergonomics is strange to you, there is good reason. The word has only recently resurfaced. Ergonomics is the science that seeks to adapt working conditions to suit the worker. In other words, the job task is designed around the employee rather than making the employee fit the job.

ERGONOMICS IS THE STUDY OF WORKING CONDITIONS IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORKERS, TOOLS, EQUIPMENT AND WORKSPACE.

There are conditions in the working environment that make it difficult for employees to work. Examples of these conditions are:

- Poor lighting, ventilation, and noise.
- Controls are hard to read or reach.
- Sitting or standing for a long period of time.
- Vibrations from hand tools or equipment.
- Being away from work stations too often.
- Repetitive motions, muscle contractions.
- Extreme temperatures.
- Poor work postures.

Signs or signals that ergonomics intervention is needed are: accidents, injuries, absenteeism, equipment/tool damage, waste, low output, and a decline in the quality of the product. Employers have established sound ergonomics practices to assist workers. Among them are:

- Work/rest schedules
- Exercise programs
- Daycare facilities
- Job rotation

Using ergonomics principles result in fewer injuries, errors, defects, costs, and time loss. There is also an increase in productivity, quality work, morale, and better relationships between employee and employer.

OSHA

One of the most effective laws to help regulate and enforce health and safety practices in business and industry is the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. The law is commonly referred to as OSHA.

The purpose of the law is to assure, as far as possible, that every man and woman has a safe and healthy environment in which to work. OSHA is a government agency that helps establish, monitor, and enforce health and safety standards which every employee and employer must follow. The only agencies NOT covered by OSHA are state, municipal, or local government agencies.

OSHA has the authority to penalize companies if they fail to follow OSHA standards. An employer can also cite employees for failure to follow safety rules. Two examples are: not wearing safety glasses or proper clothing when required.

REASONS FOR INSPECTION

OSHA inspection may occur at any time for any reason. The four most common reasons for OSHA inspections are:

1. an accidental death
2. existing danger
3. written complaint from an employee
4. decision from OSHA itself

Standards cover just about every safety and health topic imaginable. Rules are very detailed, specific, and published in several thick books. There are over 800 titles in 26 labor categories from agricultural to youth employment. Some of the categories covered under OSHA are listed on the next page.

bloodborne pathogens	lockout and tagout
confined space	compressed gas
ventilation	means of egress (exit)
general sanitation	noise
first aid services	radiation
fire protection	platforms
hazardous wastes	portable tools
materials handling	welding (brazing, torch cutting)
electrical installation	housekeeping (general sanitation)
extermination	food handling and storage
labeling	fumes, fibers, coal dust
protective equipment	paper textile
laundry	sawmill
bakery operations	walking surfaces

OSHA standards are the bottom line for creating a safe working environment. Injuries are costly to both employers and employees. Most companies have Safety Committees, consisting of administration, management, and employees. Their function is to share the work of accident prevention, safety and health education, job-improvement procedures, plant protection, and reduce costs associated with injuries and accidents.

SAFETY AWARENESS

Employees are a company's most valuable resource. A business cannot exist without the talents and production efforts of its workers. Although employers are required by law (OSHA) to provide a safe and healthy working environment, employees must also share that responsibility. Accidents don't just happen, they are caused. Employees have to think and act safely to prevent accidents. Safety has to be integrated into every part of one's job. The safe way is the only way to do a job.

Safety awareness is recognizing unsafe working conditions and practices. Safety awareness is knowing all the procedures that promote a safe working culture. It also means:

. possessing positive attitudes about safety.

. following safety rules and regulations.

. preventing accidents, injuries, and illnesses.

. handling emergency situations.

It is an impossible task to list every safety rule. Each job has its own specific rules and regulations. What these next few pages attempt to do is highlight some general rules that help create a safer working culture for everyone.

DRESS

. wear protective equipment, safety glasses, shields, leggings, gloves, hats, and safety shoes when necessary
. avoid long hair, loose clothing, and jewelry that can catch in machines

LADDERS

- use a ladder and not boxes or chairs
- set the ladder securely on flat area
- don't use an aluminum ladder near electrical lines
- don't overreach while working on a ladder

HAND TOOLS

- keep tools in good condition
- use the correct tool for the job intended

CLEANING

- keep aisles and exit doors clear
- keep work areas clean; store items
- clean up spills immediately
- use waste baskets for debris
- store food and beverages in proper places
- sweep glass with broom and dust pan

ELECTRICITY

- don't repair or adjust electrical equipment unless trained
- portable and fixed equipment should be grounded by three-wire conductors
- never pull or jerk cord to remove plugs from receptacle
- never use frayed, cracked cords
- treat all electrical lines as LIVE

FIRE

- obey "no smoking" signs; smoke only where permitted
- know where extinguishers are and how to operate them
- don't use flammable liquids near open flame
- report fire or smoke immediately
- keep heat-producing appliances (copy machine, word processor, etc.) away from walls
- turn off coffee makers, hot plates, etc. at end of day
- know the nearest location of the fire alarm

- be sure the fire alarm can be heard throughout the facility
- know where the fire exit closest to you is located
- practice the evacuation plan in case of fire
- once outside, move away from the building
- never use an elevator during a fire
- be sure stairwells are unlocked

LIFTING
- . push or pull rather than lift
- . get help if needed
- . get close to the object with one foot on the side and one foot in back
- . grip object with PALMS of hand, not fingers
- . be sure of your footing
- . lift the object by straightening your legs

SITTING
- . sit in chairs low enough for both feet to touch the floor
- . knees should be level with hips
- . sit firmly against the back of the chair
- . protect the lower back with support

CARRYING
- . use two people if necessary
- . keep travel area clear
- . be sure you can see where you're going
- . carry pipes or long objects on your shoulder with the front end high

MACHINES
- . stay away from machines unless you can operate them
- . check machine guards before operating
- . ground electrical equipment by 3-prong electrical cord
- . keep work station neat
- . know the hazards involved and how to protect yourself.

LOCKOUT/TAGOUT

This OSHA safety measure aims at preventing any unexpected startup or sudden release of energy from industrial equipment. If different types of energy are not blocked, locked, or tagged BEFORE equipment is serviced, it can easily cause accidents. The purpose of the standard is to get equipment to zero energy until repairs are completed.

IN CASE OF FIRE...

1. Leave fire area quickly. Close doors behind you.
2. Check doors before opening them. If hot, take another route.
3. In areas of smoke, crawl as you move to an exit.

HOW TO OPERATE A FIRE EXTINGUISHER

The code word is PASS.

P = PULL the pin.

Some extinguishers require releasing a latch, pressing a lever or other motion.

A = AIM the nozzle.

Aim the nozzle (horn or hose) at the BASE of the fire.

S = SQUEEZE

Squeeze or press the handle to release.

S = SWEEP

Sweep from side to side until fire is out. Be sure the fire is extinguished.

ROAD SAFETY

As part of a job description, many people in the workplace have to drive. Care and concentration are necessary for road safety. Approximately 92.6% of traffic accidents are caused, not by mechanical defects in the car or truck, but by human error; such as poor judgment, haste, anger, thoughtlessness, etc. Good driving and courteous behavior won't kill you. In fact, it could save your life. Errors that contribute to most driving accidents are:

1. Refusing to let cars into the mainstream of traffic.
2. Pulling out to passing lane without checking first.
3. Pulling out into street without looking at oncoming traffic.
4. Pulling out of parking space without checking.
5. Speeding.
6. Tailgating.
7. Using two lanes.
8. Inattention, lack of concentration, internal and external distraction.
9. Careless merging.
10. Double parking.
11. Not using turn signals.
12. Driving the wrong way on a one-way street.
13. Wrongly assuming what other drivers will do.

WHEN DRIVING, WEAR A SEAT BELT.

HEALTH ISSUES

13.

SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACE

Smoking is a health issue that affects all people in a working environment. That includes: smokers, non-smoking employees, clients, visitors, and customers. The purpose of having a smoke-free working environment is to protect everyone from the bad effects of smoking. The benefits of a smoke-free environment are:

1. Fewer job accidents, injuries, sick leaves, and fires.
2. An increase in productivity and fewer work errors.
3. Better work attendance.
4. Savings in maintenance, cleaning, and repairs.
5. Lower life insurance, workers' compensation, and disability costs.
6. Improved morale.

Companies that still allow smoking have designated areas or smoking rooms specifically for that purpose. Smokers in a smoke-free environment are required to smoke outdoors.

DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE ACT

The law as passed in 1988 applies to employers or individuals who obtain new Federal contracts or grants. Basically, the law requires employers to certify that they have a drug-free workplace, a disciplinary system or rehabilitation program to deal with substance abuse, and an internal drug-free awareness program for employees.

DRUG/AIDS TESTING

Employers cannot do random drug testing across the board. There has to be a serious safety concern. Employers can do drug testing as part of a physical but only AFTER one is offered employment. Test results are strictly confidential. Employers cannot give an AIDS test as a requirement for employment.

RIGHT TO KNOW LAW

State and Federal laws grant workers and community residents the right to know (RTK) information about hazardous substances. The key features of the law are:

1. Containers in the workplace must be properly labeled.
2. Hazard information about substances can be obtained on a form called Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). The MSDS is a guide to workplace safety. It lists chemical facts, hazardous ingredients, physical and health hazards, precautions for safe use and emergency response techniques.
3. Employers must train employees before they are exposed to hazardous wastes and each year thereafter.
4. Doctors can get MSDS forms from employers with a written request from an employee.

There are over 2,000 hazardous substances covered by the Massachusetts law. They include chemicals that can cause cancer, damage the nervous system, and result in genetic harm, and birth defects.

Federal and state laws were written to create a safe working environment; however, employees are responsible for their own safety as well. Take the time to read labels, MSDS forms, follow directions and warnings, use protective clothing and equipment, learn emergency procedures, and practice safe work habits.

HAZARDOUS WASTES

Hazardous waste is any substance which can no longer be used for the purpose for which it was first intended. Common substances include waste oil, solvents and thinners, acids and bases, paint wastes, pesticides, cyanide and other poisons, and heavy metals, such as chromium, lead, and mercury. Hazardous materials are listed

in state regulations. Other hazards are substances that easily catch fire and corrode or are explosive or toxic.

Exposure to hazardous wastes is a serious health factor. Good housekeeping procedures required by law can reduce or eliminate many problems.

MASSACHUSETTS LAW ON MATERNITY BENEFITS AND MATERNITY LEAVE OF ABSENCE

This law was first passed in the early 70's but has gone through minor changes over the years. Some of the highlights of the law are explained below.

1. The law covers people employed by companies with 6 or more workers.
2. A female who has worked part-or full-time for an employer for three months is entitled to no more than 8 weeks leave of absence, paid or unpaid, at the decision of the employer.
3. Women must give an oral or written request at least two weeks before the leave.

The law also applies to women adopting children up to age 18 or age 23 if children are mentally or physically disabled. To date, the Massachusetts legislation has not granted men leave for adoption purposes; however, it is only a matter of time before the same leave will be granted to adopting fathers as well.

THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT OF 1993

This law covers employers with 50 or more workers. It entitles employees up to 12 weeks UNPAID leave for family emergencies. Emergencies cover care for a seriously ill child, parent, spouse, care of newborn, adopted or foster child (within a year of the child's arrival), or employees' own serious medical condition, if they prevent the workers from doing their job. To qualify, employees must have worked for an employer for 12 months and 1250 hours. A 30-day notice from the employee is required.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION

Passed in 1911, this act requires every EMPLOYER to pay full coverage to an employee who has suffered a job-related injury or illness resulting in the loss of five or more regularly scheduled workdays.

At the turn of the century, this was a good law. Injured employees no longer had to depend on charity or wait for court decisions for their daily keep. Presently, the law encourages abuse.

Workmen's Compensation is a no-fault system which means it doesn't matter who is at fault. All an employee has to do is say that he or she was injured on the job. This places the full responsibility on the employer while encouraging sick behavior, fraud, and dishonest behavior on the part of some employees. The law needs to be revised to discourage abuse.

Until the law can be changed, here are some preventive steps employers are taking to provide a safer and healthier working environment:

. Make sure person is suitable for the job.

. Increase morale. Employees with morale problems are more likely to be injured.

. Have a drug-free, smoke-free workplace. Use drug and alcohol testing.

. Provide safety and healthy workshops. Give rewards to people who are responsible.

. Utilize the Employee Assistance Program

. Monitor absenteeism and complaints as warning signals.

. Establish a powerful in-house Safety Committee.

STRESS

Stress is a physical, mental, or emotional tension. Stress is a pressure outside yourself that makes you feel uncomfortable inside. Everyone is under stress most of the time. In fact, a certain amount of stress is good because it helps you get things done and moving. What is harmful is too much stress.

Signs of stress are both mental and physical. A few examples include: tense muscles, sleeplessness, trouble staying awake, boredom, tiredness, depression, isolation, diarrhea, itching, constipation, restlessness, headaches, anxiety, fear, etc.

SOURCES OF STRESS

Stress comes from the workplace, home, society, our way of life, relationships, and the environment. Changes in life styles are basic causes of stress: death, illness, job, home, retirement, divorce, pregnancy, finances, and the like.

There are three ways to handle stress: run, solve, or cope.

1. Running solves nothing and causes more stress.
2. Most problems need to be faced and solved. (See MCDI's booklet, Problem Solving Techniques.)
3. Learn to cope and live with problems that cannot be solved. There may be times, however, when outside help is needed. If stress is severe or lasts over a long period of time, professional help may be the answer. Consult a doctor, counselor, employer, or other helpful, qualified professionals.

PREVENTING STRESS

There are many ways to release stress. Consider the following suggestions.

1. One of the best aids in controlling stress is to get enough sleep each night. Avoid taking sleeping pills unless prescribed by a doctor. Lying quietly for a short period of time or taking a nap during the day is also very helpful.
2. Moderate use of alcohol, caffeine and over-the-counter drugs. Say no to drugs and smoking. Eat sensibly and regularly. Have a physical exam yearly.
3. Exercise daily. Go for a walk during lunch hour. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Eat lunch away from your work station to refresh yourself. Enjoy hobbies that are different from your work and take you out of yourself. Spend time with friends, go shopping, watch movies, or read a book.
4. Talk over your concerns with people you trust before they build up and create a crisis. If stress is severe or prolonged, get professional help.
5. Communicate honestly with others. Associate with people who affirm you. Learn to receive from others as well as give to others.
6. Seek and enjoy alone time. Be comfortable with and befriend yourself. Use time, don't let time use you. Guard your personal freedom for time and space.
7. Perform meaningful work but remember that there is more to life than just work. Take risks when you find you are not growing. Do what you consider is life giving and do it regularly.

8. Use time between work and home to your advantage. It is a time to let go of the day's stress and get excited about the upcoming personal hours.
9. Plan your yearly vacations well. It is a time to catch up with energy lost during the year. Use 3-day breaks (mini vacations) wisely.
10. Balance your emotions. Don't give people power over your emotions. Find a balance between being a cold robot and letting everyone's problems sap your energy.
11. Build positive attitudes and self-esteem. Take care of yourself. Have a physical exam yearly and go to the dentist every six months.

The way you choose to deal with stress is in your own power.

PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ALLOW ENOUGH TIME OUT IN THEIR LIVES OFTEN EXPERIENCE THE PHYSICAL OR MENTAL AFFECTS OF STORED UP STRESS.

MANAGING TIME

There are always far more things to do on the job than the time you have to do them. Even if you are the fastest person in the world, you won't be able to do everything that needs to be done. Nor can you add more hours in the day. Time is limited so use it effectively. Here are a few suggestions:

1. PRIORITIZE YOUR WORK - Focus on the task that is most important. If you need help on this, ask your supervisor.
2. DON'T WASTE TIME - If you have control of your time, it is much easier to waste it. Set limits on breaks or lunch time so they won't get out of hand.
3. PUTTING OFF JOBS UNTIL LATER - More time and energy is wasted thinking about what should be done. The task could be finished in the time it takes to think about it. Train yourself to get the job done and out of the way. Putting off till later what you could easily do now is a waste of time.
4. FIND YOUR MOST PRODUCTIVE TIME - There are some times during the day that are better than others. Match difficult tasks with peak moments and do routine jobs during down time.
5. MUST DO LIST - Write a must-do list of things that need to be done. Place the most important task at the top and work downward. Cross off each task as you do it. This gives you a sense of accomplishment. It might even save you an embarrassing moment when things slip your mind.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) helps EMPLOYEES and their families deal with problems that affect their job performance and personal lives. The goal of the organization is to assist employees in time of need or crisis.

Although people can handle most daily problems as they arise, there are some situations that become too difficult to solve alone. Assistance is usually needed when the problem:

1. is hard to identify.
2. interferes with or distracts from one's job performance.
3. can no longer be solved by oneself.
4. takes up too much time or emotional energy.
5. affects one's health and relationship with family members.

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE

EAP offers assistance in solving a variety of problems. A few of these services are listed below. If necessary, EAP can refer employees to other community agencies that provide the best source of help, service, or treatment.

Family Problems
Divorce, Separation
Sexual Matters
Single Parenting
Unresolved Brief
Job Transition
Legal Matters
Eating Disorders
Educational Workshops

Substance Abuse
Financial Issues
Health Concerns
Crisis Intervention
Disability Adjustment
Severe Stress or Fatigue
Gambling
Job Performance

Other people may recommend that you seek the services of EAP: your boss, supervisor, manager, union representative, co-worker, medical staff, family members, or friends. However, the decision to utilize EAP services lies first and foremost with the individual.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Regardless of the circumstances that bring an individual to EAP, the entire experience is ABSOLUTELY confidential. Matters are held with the same respect and confidentiality as those shared with a doctor, lawyer, or clergyperson. There are two exceptions to this statement: information can be shared with your written permission or when information is ordered by a court of law.

COSTS

There are three factors to be aware of regarding costs:

1. EAP services (counseling, referrals, consultation) are free.
2. If referred to an outside agency, services are either free or affordable through a sliding-fee scale.
3. Many services are covered by a health insurance plan.

Your instructor will share a brochure of a working EAP program

HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGAL ISSUES

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY (EEO)

EEO laws state that most private businesses and firms, public and private institutions, labor unions, and apprenticeship programs cannot discriminate in hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, fringe benefits, and other employment practices.

EQUAL PAY ACT	. requires same pay for men and women doing the same work.
CIVIL RIGHTS ACT	. prohibits job discrimination in all employment practices on the basis of race, color, sex, religion and national origin.
EXECUTIVE ORDER	. prohibits discrimination in organizations having contracts of $10,000 or more with the federal government.
AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT	. prohibits discrimination in hiring and employment of workers over 40 years of age.
REHABILITATION ACT	. prohibits discrimination of physically and mentally handicapped applicants and employees by federal contractors.
VIETNAM ERA VETERANS' READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT	. prohibits discrimination of disabled veterans and veterans of the Vietnam war.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is the expression of any word or behavior of a sexual nature that is unwelcome, threatening, or a hindrance to job productivity. Sexual harassment involves sexual words or actions between a man and woman, a woman and a man, a man to another man, or a woman to a woman.

According to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of 1980, sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. Breaking the law depends on how the harassed person INTERPRETS the unwelcome words or behavior and the IMPACT the behavior makes on the victim. What may seem innocent to one person may be offensive to another. Sexual harassment is usually caused by poor communication and insensitive behavior. That is why it is so important to know what behaviors are unacceptable. Basically, there are three forms of sexual harassment: verbal, visual, and physical.

VERBAL

Verbal harassment refers to the spoken word. Examples of verbal harassment are: pressure for dates, cat calls or whistles, suggestive or sexual comments, threats, insults, sexual jokes, remarks based on gender, propositions, asking others about their sex life, etc.

VISUAL

Visual refers to non-verbal gestures and sexual materials that can be seen. They include winks or licking lips, leering, sexual calendars, posters, pictures, computer software, etc.

PHYSICAL

Examples of physical harassment are invasion of personal space. It refers to rape or attempted rape, kissing, leaning over, brushing against, cornering, touching, or pinching someone in ways that are uncomfortable.

EFFECTS ON THE WORKPLACE

It is against the law to make sexual favors the basis for employment, continued employment, job promotion, or benefits. Harassment creates all kinds of unpleasant and unhealthy working conditions. It denies personal integrity and mutual respect, increases conflict among workers, lessens production and performance, causes emotional and physical pain, high legal fees, and loss of employment.

WHAT TO DO

1. Know your own attitude about the issues.
2. Know your company's policy on sexual harassment.
3. Treat everyone with respect.
4. Think before making remarks.
5. Speak out. Make it clear to the harasser what behaviors are not welcomed.
6. Keep written records (time, place, witnesses, etc.).
7. Seek help by consulting a personnel director, counselor, etc.
8. If all the above fails, file charges.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The face of the American workplace is changing rapidly. At the beginning of the 20th century, the workplace consisted mainly of white males of European descent. In a few short years, at the turn of the 21st century, at least 85% of the workplace will be women, minorities, and immigrants. No matter where you work, you meet different types of people whose culture is different from your own. This is called cultural diversity.

CULTURAL (culture) = a type of people, civilization, society

DIVERSITY (diverse) = many different types of people within a society

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Diversity expresses itself in many ways, depending of a person's experiences and background. Here are a few factors that created cultural differences:

RACE	a group or class of people: black, white, brown, yellow
LIFE STYLE	a pattern or way of living: alone, family, community
BIOLOGY	masculine, feminine, body size, skin, hair, eye color
FAMILY STATUS	size and place in the family
NATIONALITY	nation in which one is born
REGIONAL BACKGROUND	neighborhood, city, region (east, west)
ETHNIC BACKGROUND	customs, language, traditions
AGE	a period of human life (youth, old age)
EXPERIENCES	things that occur throughout a person's life

DISABILITY	physically or mentally impaired
RELIGION	beliefs, philosophy, values
PROFESSION	occupation in life
EDUCATION BACKGROUND	schools attended, skills learned
POLITICS	political party: democrat, republican, other
ECONOMIC STATUS	income, poverty, wealth, class
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	married, single, etc.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN ACTION

No matter where you work, you'll be with people who are different from you. This experience creates a challenge for everyone. You need to connect to co-workers and customers so you can do your job well. You undermine your own job performance and the goals of the organization when you react negatively to people who are different from you. Consequently, the ability to get along with people is critical.

Diversity appears in many forms. What is acceptable in one culture might be judged as rude behavior by another. The examples below show how cultural behaviors cause problems if they are not understood.

- People in the Mid-East stand close together when speaking. This closeness makes people in the U.S. uncomfortable. Other people stand far apart. The distance can be interpreted as unfriendly.

- Direct eye contact is a sign of friendliness to Americans. The opposite is true for Asians and Hispanics. Avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect.

- In the U.S., work meetings are open to brainstorm new ideas. To people in another culture, that is "showing off".

- Americans tend to be individualistic. Many cultures find their identity as part of a group.

- Some cultures speak only when spoken to, rarely give ideas, don't initiate tasks, and never complain. This is far from true for Americans.

- The working atmosphere for many cultures is to get right down to business at hand. In the U.S., people tend to operate in a more relaxed, relational manner.

- In addition to differences in customs, there are also the differences in languages.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

There are ways to bridge gaps that occur because of cultural diversity. Respect and appreciate differences as gifts. Acknowledge that all cultures contribute to society. Avoid assumptions, prejudices, judgments, and stereotypes based on culture.

When communicating with people for whom English is a Second Language, speak slowly and clearly without raising your voice. Pause now and then to allow time for the listener to process what is said. Don't make judgments about other people's accent.

Educate yourself about other cultures. Respect and treat everyone as you wish to be treated. Do more than tolerate or "put up with" cultural diversity. Welcome it. Differences provide rich experiences in the workplace, increase job satisfaction, and contribute to the greater success of the world economy.

SIGNS OF A QUALITY WORKING ENVIRONMENT

1. The environment is clean, safe, and pleasant to the senses.

2. Employees' gifts and talents are recognized, developed, and appreciated.

3. Most people understand that everyone makes mistakes.

4. Co-workers work together as a team.

5. There is good leadership within the facility.

6. The mission statement is clear, known, and practiced by everyone.

7. Diversity is respected.

8. The work is satisfying and rewarding.

9. Everyone is equal regardless of race, color, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

10. Meetings are focused and goals accomplished.

11. Others appreciate what you do.

12. All share in the pain as well as the gain.

13. There is a balance between individual and organizational need.